Minecraft Game Takes Student Learning to a New Level

Technology Transforms the District's Classrooms

The School District of University City, regularly pursues new ways to attract and engage students and offer unique opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge.

One of these options is Minecraft, a simple, yet difficult game for all ages.

"It's a strategy game, a civilization building, building blocks sort of game that five-year-olds are playing, and 50-year-olds are playing at different complex levels," Robert Dillon, EdD, director of innovative learning, said.

Dillon said using gaming and technology make learning memorable.

"What we're trying to do is really hone in on something that we are calling learning re-imagined," he said.

According to Dillon, 85 to 90 percent of learning occurs in a passive manner, with instructors teaching subject matter, assigning homework then testing students.

"We're trying to flip that on its head and find a better balance where we're actually pulling learning through the passion of kids," he added.

The department explores various options to create an atmosphere in the classroom where students are excited to learn and interact with lessons that appeal to their natural skills, hobbies and learning styles. On March 2nd, the District hosted an information session to introduce the Minecraft program, allow teachers to become familiar with it and discuss strategies for using it in the classroom.

"University City is trying to become a location where teachers from around the region want to come to not only learn about what we're doing, but also learn from the resources that we're able to bring to the District," he concluded. "This is just one example of how we're starting to build some momentum about University City being the place for teachers to come together to learn."

Robust New Website Launches in Spring 2017

We heard you! The School District of University City is transitioning to a brand new website in March 2017. The new site will feature beautiful graphic imagery and a simple user interface making it easier for families and community members to engage with the District.

The website consistently ranked as an area of improvement in various focus groups despite a change in provider in 2015. Dr. Sharonica Hardin-Bartley made upgrading the new website a priority after taking the reins as superintendent in July.

"The website is our front door in many aspects," Hardin-Bartley said. "When guests come to your front door they expect to be greeted warmly and made to feel at home. Our website is not as welcoming as we would like nor does it provide the excellent experience we want for our stakeholders."

Patricia Washington, executive director of communications and community outreach, said the switch to the new website is timely.

"The District is in the middle of branding efforts with a new District logo and new school logos coming soon," she said. "This is the ideal time to introduce the new website as part of that re-branding effort."

District staff participated in a three-day training session with Blackboard, the new service provider, in February in preparation for the new site launch in March.

The new website at www.ucityschools.org, hosted by Schoolwires/Blackboard®, will feature a user-friendly interface that is easier for families and community members to engage with the District.